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Zbigniew Osiński

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Introduction: The Notebooks of Rena Mirecka

Zbigniew Osiński

In the spring of 2004, [Rena Mirecka](#) allowed me access to her notebooks and some loose pages of her notes from the years 1957–70, 1973, and 1974. There are hundreds of pages filled with writing in a variety of notebooks, note pads, loose pages, scraps of paper, and the occasional restaurant napkin or newspaper fragment. Mirecka wrote them most often during rehearsals, acting workshops, and meetings and conversations she deemed important. Her notes on theatre work are interspersed with comments of a strictly personal nature, often quite intimate. However, the [Laboratory Theatre](#) and her work in that ensemble invariably remain the author's leading subject and constant reference point.

Mirecka had not gone back to review her notes, and did not attempt (luckily for us!) to turn them into a literary work, although she would reread them after some time had passed and add on more comments. These were written in different colored inks, or in pencil, without regard to chronological order, and were rarely dated. Significant portions of the notes are today largely or completely illegible.

A complete edition of this material—the merit of which, as a document of the daily activities of Grotowski's ensemble written from the inside and in real time, is hard to overestimate—will undoubtedly require many more hours of detailed work.

For the purposes of this publication, I have selected Mirecka's notes from her work at the [Theatre of Thirteen Rows](#) and the Laboratory Theatre of Thirteen Rows in Opole, in the years 1959–64. The principles guiding my choices were the following: I have edited notes pertaining to theatre work, or other closely related work, editing out other writing unless certain fragments proved to be indispensable. I have included my own notes on workshops and rehearsals as examples only if I became convinced that, out of their context, they were bound to produce misunderstandings and misconceptions, and that their publication might prove more confusing than illuminating.

The "Opole-period notes" consist of four notebooks, written in from both ends (that is, starting from the beginning as well as the end pages of the notebook); the pages are not numbered, and some pages have been torn out (that is, there are visible signs of torn paper). In addition to the notebooks, there are scores of loose pages and some private letters. In the earlier notebooks, there are entries following the period in question by several years; they refer to private matters and to hobbies, such as her acquisition of foreign languages (phrases and words in French, German, and Italian). It is a true *silva rerum*.

The first notebook has a hard cover the color of faded burgundy, with ruled paper, and notes first in blue, then in green ink or pencil (the oldest one shows the date January 2, 1958, the last one November 17, 1960).

The second notebook has a black hard cover, with lined paper. The handwritten title in green ink reads: "Rena Mirecka *Elementary acting classes*, season 1961/1962." The first dated entry, in blue ink reads: "Lesson 5: June 17, [19]62, took place June 19, [19]62," with an annotation "Grot came over and said that I did well." The pages describing the first four lessons were torn out of the notebook; only a fragment of one of the lessons—most likely the first—is preserved: one and a half pages in pencil, no date. The next entry reads:

"Lesson 6: June 24, [19]62," followed by notes in black ink describing a rehearsal of Stanisław Wyspiański's *Akropolis* (not dated, but with a box drawn around them) and notes in pencil from a different rehearsal of the same play, dated June 29, 1962—"in the wardrobe of the 13 Rows Theatre"; "Lesson 7: July 2, [19]62"; "Lesson 8: July 6, [19]62." Next, there are entries from the 1962/1963 season: "Lesson 1: September 19, [19]62"; "Lesson 2: September 21, [19]62"; "Lesson 3: September 28, [19]62"; "Lesson 4: September 30, [19]62." The next entry comes seven months later—April 6, 1963; Mirecka justifies the long pause in diary entries: "I did not take lecture notes as I memorized the exercises and lead them without the lesson notes."

The following notes come from the period from April to July 1963: the April 7 rehearsal of Marlowe's *Faust*; April 22—"a session more theoretical than practical" (with an annotation made on July 27 of that same year, which reads: "when I recall that lesson, Boss, I think it came from the experience of your body and soul"); April 27—practice session; May 1 and 29—plasticity session; June 30—plasticity session (incident with *Ryszard Cieślak*) and the beginning of collaboration with Michael Elster on the film *Letter from Opole* ("he is shooting a film about us, about our work, about our stage productions"); July 1, 3, and 27. On the last pages, there are notes from a year before: two voice lessons conducted by *Zygmunt Molik* on September 19 and 21, 1962, and "Conversations of the Laboratory Theatre of 13 Rows," led by Grotowski on October 25, 1962. This notebook also does not adhere to a chronological order; for example, an entry from July 1, 1963 is on the last page. Several places show signs of pages being torn out: out of a hundred-page notebook, there are thirty-two pages left, twenty-four of them covered in writing (some are single page)

The third notebook comprises a black hardcover and one hundred pages, lined. The cover shows a white note glued on, which reads in blue ink: "A few notes. Years 1960–1962." The earliest entry is dated May 25, 1960 ("In *Altana* by Jahoł *[Antoni Jahołkowski]*"), the last entry is dated April 27, 1961 ("Rehearsal of *Forefathers' Eve*").

The fourth notebook includes sixty ruled pages. The blue cover reads in ink: "Re[na] Mir[recka], 13 Rows Theatre in Opole, December 30, 1963. Exercises, etudes." Inside, there are penciled notes from Grotowski's presentation "Tradition. Dictated by the Boss on December 2, [19]64," a record of exercises and etudes from the year 1964, among others the etudes for two stage productions of the Laboratory Theatre: *The Hamlet Study* based on Shakespeare and Wyspiański (the titles of the etudes were: "The Selling of Cows," "Boot Camp," "The Attack," "In the Abode," "Playtime," then came "Remarks after the First Rehearsal of the First Act—January 18, 1964," next "Scene Mother-Hamlet," "Bathhouse"—explication on March 11, 1964) and *The Constant Prince* based on Calderon/Słowacki (August 28, 1964).

Undeniably, Mirecka's notes distinctly reveal the steady development of an actor's consciousness on the part of the author, as well as of the whole Grotowski and *Flaszen* ensemble over the period of five years. A telling observation about the process was given to us after many years by Maciej Prus, an actor of the Laboratory Theatre of 13 Rows in the season 1962/1963, who was a student of the method from the very beginning, about their first stage production of *Orpheus* by Jean Cocteau:

It was hard. The conditions were bad. Today we don't talk about it, but those were people who realistically had no chance—let's be truthful about it—no chance for an engagement at another theatre. They were either straight out of school or not particularly talented. Rena Mirecka worked in a library because she could not get into any theatres. Ewa Lubowiecka came from the Rhapsodic Theatre and had no diploma, the same as Antek Jahołkowski, and in those days diplomas were a must. A lack of diploma was an obstacle that couldn't be overcome. . . . Grotowski's first productions did not point to anything special, either creatively or as a controversy.¹

¹ "I dystans do tego świata nie pozwalał mi tam zostać: z Maciejem Prusem rozmawia Agnieszka Wójtowicz" ['My distance to the world would not let me stay there': Agnieszka Wójtowicz Interviews Maciej Prus], ed. Grzegorz Janikowski, *Pamiętnik Teatralny*, no. 1–2 (2000): 163.



Orpheus, Opole, 1959. From left, Antoni Jahołkowski, Rena Mirecka, Tadeusz Bartkowiak. Photo by Leonard Olejnik. Reproduced courtesy of Agnieszka Wójtowicz.

It is not coincidental then that the twenty-five-year-old Mirecka's notes begin with dreams and plans of acting in film and television. This theme comes back again and again, by the way, in an almost obsessive manner. It is only with time that the actress finds full creative satisfaction in her collaboration with Grotowski—the exact moment comes during work on Wyspiański's *Akropolis* and peaks with Marlowe's *The Tragical History of Dr. Faustus*.

More than anything else, the notebooks paint a picture of Mirecka and her colleagues as regular people with their own mundane problems: a lack of housing and money and the ensuing constant deprivations. Moreover, in contrast to the idyllic myth created later, the ensemble of the Laboratory Theatre as revealed in the notebooks is not some embodied ideal but a group of real people. The main problem in the group is alcohol; for example, in her account of guest appearances in Łódź in February and March of 1963, Mirecka writes:

We are in Łódź with the Theatre, from February 16 to March 5; we're performing *Akropolis* by Wyspiański. We've been acclaimed for stage design as well as acting [the form of the actors' craft]. The ensemble keeps in good shape though drinking a lot. Today, I'm in two performances requiring tremendous strength and conditioning. I'm tired out. . . .

When it comes to this trait the Laboratory Theatre shared in a tradition of much of the acting community and people in the arts in general. The difference came in a completely unique work regime installed and ruthlessly executed by Grotowski. Those unable to carry the workload sooner or later washed out and left the ensemble.

Of great value are the descriptions of the plasticity exercises from the years 1961–1964, led by Mirecka, as well as some vocal exercises led by Zygmunt Molik. Mirecka also describes some acting etudes and several rehearsals for four Laboratory Theatre productions: *Akropolis*, *The Tragical History of Dr. Faustus*, *The Hamlet Study*, and *The Constant Prince* by Słowacki/Calderon.

Truly priceless, however, are copies of Grotowski's letters to the group, which have previously been unpublished elsewhere, and his internal memos (e.g., from July 21, 1962), as well as the *conversatorium* of the Laboratory Theatre of 13 Rows under his direction (e.g., from October 26, 1962) and previously unknown statements dictated to the ensemble (e.g., from April 22, 1963 about the actor's craft and the meaning of exercises; May 17, 1964 upon his return from France; December 2, 1964—"Tradition" and "Season 1964/1965"—the last one of those pertains to two techniques of actor's craft, referred here to as "technique 1 [T1]" and "technique 2 [T2]"). Thanks to Mirecka's notes (and to the independently made notes of [Zbigniew Cynkutis](#)), those documents were preserved and can be published today.

For the purposes of publication, I have made the necessary corrections in the fragments selected as to punctuation, leaving Mirecka's syntax intact to reflect the function of workbooks. (Thus, I remind the reader that they were made under working conditions, for the purposes of work, and to help the author's memory. They were never corrected for spelling, grammar, etc. by the author.) In short, I have not tried to turn Mirecka's notebooks into a literary memoir since that was never her intention. I have corrected and completed only those fragments I believed to be necessary for the reader's understanding. All of my comments are bracketed in square brackets [].

Finally, a word about footnotes; I did not wish to multiply them further, thus, if the reader is not able to find explicatory information by referring to a footnote, s/he should look further into Bruno Chojak's "Kalendarium Ireny Mireckiej," included in *Podróż: Rena Mirecka – aktorka Teatru Laboratorium* (Wrocław: Ośrodek Badań Twórczości Jerzego Grotowskiego i Poszukiwań Teatralno-Kulturowych, 2005), and primarily in my books *Grotowski i jego Laboratorium* (Warsaw: Państwowy Instytut Wydawniczy, 1979)² and *Teatr "13 Rzędów" i Teatr Laboratorium "13 Rzędów." Opole 1959–64 Kronika-Bibliografia* (Opole: Galeria Sztuki Współczesnej w Opolu, Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Opolskiego, 1997).

² A translated and abridged version of this book is available in English: Zbigniew Osiński, [Grotowski and His Laboratory](#), translated and abridged by Lillian Vallee and Robert Findlay (New York: PAJ Publications, 1986).



Rena Mirecka during exercises, Opole, 1964. Photo by Fredi Graedl, Laboratory Theatre. Reproduced courtesy of the Grotowski Institute Archives.

RENA MIRECKA

Notebooks, 1959–1964

Szczawnica, July 21, 1959

. . . July 3, 1959 – what an important date! For the first time, I have signed a contract with a real theatre company: [The Theatre of Thirteen Rows](#) and [Rena Mirecka](#). I'll be in Opole. . . . I am engaged solely thanks to [Jerzy Grotowski](#), who took over as director and who hired me. All the other opportunities sooner or later failed to pan out.³

Szczawnica, August 8, 1959

. . . I want to act in the movies so bad. . . .
I was waiting for a copy of Cocteau's [Orpheus](#) to see what my part is—management was supposed to send one from Opole. At the moment I'm worried sick as there is no news. . . .

Opole, Hotel Dworcowy, September 21, 1959

. . . I've been here since the 7th without a place to stay. This was quite unexpected—the theatre was supposed to take care of my lodgings. The other actors are in the same situation; among the girls [Barbara \[Barska\]](#) is living with me. . . .

In the Theatre of Thirteen Rows, director Jerzy Grotowski is putting on Cocteau's *Orpheus*.⁴ I've gotten the part of Death, a tiny role. The atmosphere is nice. . . . [Ludwik Flaszen](#) is part of the management.

Opole, Hotel Dworcowy, October 5, 1959

. . . I don't know why, but I'm falling apart. . . . It's been a year since I've started rehearsals for Television and now Jasiukiewicz got the leading part.⁵ He is so charming and so romantic. "Time passes quickly, and the only truths on this earth are love and death," says Sasha the hussar (from *A Love Story*; Sasha is played by Jasiukiewicz). Is it so? Surely, yes. . . .

Only two days to opening night; I want to do well. —Dear God, why is it that only at times, at certain moments, something stirs within us, thoughts awake, feelings are felt, we feel rebellion, we feel how grand and incomprehensible life is? Why aren't we always so actively alive? —Aha! —We would become exhausted. Ha, ha, ha.

³ The actress submits that immediately after finishing college she worked for two seasons, 1957/1958 and 1958/1959, in a traveling theatre troupe, Teatr Ziemi Krakowskiej; however, it turned out to be only seasonal employment. According to Maciej Prus, "Rena Mirecka worked at a library since she could not get into any theatre." Prus, 163.

⁴ Jean Cocteau's *Orpheus*. Translated into Polish by Roman Kołoniecki. Adapted and directed by Jerzy Jeleński. Music consultant, Jerzy Kaszycki. Opole, Theatre of Thirteen Rows, premiere October 8, 1959.

⁵ "A Love Story" by Blanka Miecińska and Jerzy Wittlin, *Polish Television Theatre*, October 5, 1959.



Orpheus, Opole, 1959. From left, Antoni Jahołkowski, Tadeusz Bartkowiak, Rena Mirecka. Photo by Leonard Olejnik. Reproduced courtesy of Agnieszka Wójtowicz.

Opole, October 13, 1959

On the 8th of October there was a closed preview of *Orpheus* for the press corps at the Theatre of Thirteen Rows.⁶ I was exceptional (in the opinion of persons partial and impartial); I surpassed myself. Mirosław was happy; Mommy was pleased and truly impressed.

The days of pre- and post-opening night nerves are over. Now, I'm anxiously awaiting reviews. Ordinary, dreary days are ahead of me: full of thoughts about Mirek, also about films. I so dream about getting any part in a movie.

I'm awaiting my next role in the Theatre; the play is Byron's [Cain](#).

Opole, October 28, 1959

Lately, there have been hard times. Tonight I'm going to bed without supper. Just two more days to a paycheck. But how much will I have left over? . . .

We haven't started rehearsals for *Cain* yet. There are performances only four days a week. The reviews of *Orpheus* are all over the place, but they're usually positive about my scene. The loneliness is becoming intolerable. . . . I'm not even able to read anymore.

⁶ See Osiński, *Teatr "13 Rzędów" i Teatr Laboratorium "13 Rzędów." Opole 1959–64*.

Opole, October 29, 1959, after a performance, 10:30 p.m.

I am not well. My strength is at its limit. So many nights without regular sleep finally are taking their toll. . . . I keep the lights on at all hours. I fall asleep at dawn. I feel desperate. For the first time in three days I've had supper tonight, and that's only thanks to Pani Jadzia [Jadwiga Drewicz],⁷ who came and offered to lend me 20 zloties. All of this is just too much for me to put up with.

[Opole, November ?, 1959] Thursday evening, 11:00 p.m. at the hotel, still at the hotel

. . . since I fall asleep early mornings, I wake up v[ery] late, I get up often at 11:00–11:30 a.m., so I have a late breakfast. Then, usually still in my pajamas, I memorize my lines (they may be short but I still need to know them). . . . [M]ost likely [Antoś](#) will play Adam [in *Cain*] – at least that's what Kurczyna is pressing for, he doesn't want it because it requires singing and dancing so [Molik](#) will talk it over with Jerzy and I should benefit in the end, for a bad acting partner in such light material is like a leg iron, and Antek always makes me laugh with his comic performances. Also, Antoś wants the role since there is nothing else for him in the play – only at the end, after the third act, there is a mime role written in, the mime is supposed to perform a dance about the unity of the world, a pantomime he is supposed to improvise.⁸ This is really impossible without the help of an expert; this cannot just be a stunt. So, I'm studying Eve – I'm very happy with the costume. . . .

To be honest, I should be very happy, because this is continuation of the Death role when it comes to movement, to temperament. The scenes, especially the ones Jerzy calls "Philistines on Parade," are going to be spectacular. . . .

Opole, December 5, 1959, Saturday 12:00 p.m.

. . . I wrote nothing in the entire month of November. And there was so much going on. I got the role of Eve in *Cain*. . . . We played in Poznań between the 3rd and 16th – *Orpheus* – with great success.⁹

A few days ago I had a real boost. I got some money from my parents for a down payment on a fur coat. It is so pretty.

All the same, I'm going through a difficult time searching for the meaning of life and death. Ha, ha, that sounds so pompous. . . .

Opole, January 30, 1960

Opening night of *Cain*.

Opole, March 20, 1960

. . . I am staying at Jadzia's (administrative director of the theatre). I like it here, a lot.

The day after tomorrow we're starting rehearsals of a third play: [Tadeusz] Poniecki's *Behind the Hill* directed by [Kazimierz Kutz](#). Big plus: he's a young promising film director. I got the part of Lucia-Patrycja. I'm very happy. . . .

⁷ Jadwiga Drewicz was the administrative director of the Theatre of Thirteen Rows.

⁸ In the end, Grotowski wrote the text for it – see the program notes for the production.

⁹ In Theatre Satyra on Red Army Avenue (today St. Marcin's Street). Zbigniew Osieński, "Występy gościnne Teatru Laboratorium 1959–1984. Kronika Działalności 1978–1984" [Guest Performances of the Laboratory Theatre, 1959–1984], *Pamiętnik Teatralny*, no. 1–4 (2000): 632.

Between February 29th and March 6th the troupe was touring in Kraków.¹⁰ The effect—a resounding success. [Prof. Gallowa](#) visited me: “Irenka, you’re a second Zula Pogorzelska. . .” she said. Roma [Romana Próchnicka] and Ewa, Ania, Michał, Krzysztof, Mrs. Halina and Mrs. Roma, Jasiu Güntner, Piotr Skrzynecki and Krysia Zachwatowicz, all congratulated me warmly—SUCCESS.¹¹

I’m excited that the rehearsals of the new play are just around the corner. Jerzy Grotowski is staging *Faust* in Poznań.¹²

Generally, I’m doing well. I work a lot and it gives me a positive outlook. In the Theatre there are always difficulties of the “to be or not to be” kind, a constant lack of funds. I’m afraid that for the new season we’ll be without an *engagement*. . . .

[Opole] April 28, 1960

Easter is gone. A week before the holidays, on the 10th, we finished a ten-day engagement of the 13 Rows Theatre in Warsaw (*Cain* and *Orpheus* on the STS stage). Crushing reviews, the public divided into two camps “for” and “against” us. Almost all agree: anti-aesthetic, fussy, lacking poetics.

Yesterday we got really down. Yet we came back full of enthusiasm for rehearsals of *Behind the Hill* with Kutz. Unfortunately, our wonderful soc[ialist] regime is capable of choking off all undertaking: he has been forbidden to work for a period of two years, which forced them to cancel our rehearsals.¹³ . . . I’m worried, and really I’m just very sad because I enjoyed the role of Lucia-Patrycja so much. Kutz directed me so well in a really interesting way, with so much charm. Well, too bad.

Cross-eyed Luck.¹⁴ Very good, courageous, artistic movie!

We don’t know what’s coming next. Hopefully, they won’t close down the Theatre. . . .

[Opole] June 1, 1960

[An entry by Jerzy Grotowski in Rena Mirecka’s notebook from 1960 to 1962:]

“Above all, the *most essential* thing is faith: a ‘secular’ faith in art, but faith.”¹⁵

[Opole] October 13, 1960. Friday, 11:15 p.m.

. . . I’m exhausted. I’ve been studying for the role at all hours. My hope was to come up with something more, but since I’m back from the theatre I’ve been working and right now—aside from a splitting headache—nothing cerebral is happening. . . .

¹⁰ In Theatre Groteska, two performances of Cocteau’s *Orpheus* and four of Byron’s *Cain*.

¹¹ In 1957 Irena Kądziołka completed her studies in the Acting department of the [Ludwik Solski PWST](#) [the State Academy for the Dramatic Arts] in Kraków. Romana Próchnicka was in the same Class of ’57. I was unable to establish the identities of the other five (Halina, Roma, Ania, Ewa, Michał).

¹² Johann Wolfgang Goethe’s *Faust*, Polish translation Józef Paszkowski. Adaptation and directing Jerzy Grotowski. Stage design Piotr Potworowski. Poznań, Theatre Polski, premiere April 13, 1960.

¹³ The play’s author, Tadeusz Poniński, in a letter dated March 3, 1997 from Chorzów to the editor of *Dialog*, Jerzy Sieradzki, stated that director Kutz “in the middle of rehearsals, was stripped of his professional duties by the deputy [minister of culture], Zaorski, as a reprisal for his defiance regarding the ending of the movie *No One’s Calling* adapted from Józef Hen. Kutz confirmed the story.

¹⁴ *Zezowate Szczęście* [Cross-eyed Luck], a film directed by [Andrzej Munk](#) (assistant directors Andrzej Wróbel and Roman Polański), screenplay Jerzy Stefan Stawiński, cinematography Jerzy Lipman and Krzysztof Winiewicz (camera operator Andrzej Gronau). Classic masterpiece of the [Polish Film School](#)—shot in 1959, premiered April 4, 1960.

¹⁵ Black notebook, hardcover, 100 pages, paper pasted to the cover page with a blue ink inscription: “A Few Notes. Year 1960–1962.” (next: Black notebook, 1960–1962).

[Opole] October 15, 1960

Sunday, it's already late, past 2 p.m. I've been working since morning. It's toasty here; I've got a fire going in the hearth. Now a little break; I got a slice of bread to take my mind off work. I've leafed through the Rubens we have here . . . so that I can concentrate in a moment and search for the right form for my [Shakuntala](#).¹⁶ The work is very difficult; Jerzy is not helping at all, we have to come up with our own ideas. So far he is pleased. I've noticed that whatever I develop by myself sticks for good. I'm talking here about my work on the Kutz project, now I can mine that and make use of some fragments. Yesterday during rehearsals I told Jerzy what I wanted to do. "Very good," he said. But I didn't mention that it came from that other role. Either way, it's not important. . . .

8:55 p.m. I'm home. The performance was canceled. A review came out in *Trybuna Opolska* by Lubecki.¹⁷ He savaged Grotowski and his experimentation. He mentioned me and Molik; about the rest, he said they were embarrassingly amateurish. Supposedly, *Polityka*¹⁸ is running a review as well but I haven't seen it. Maybe I'll still be able to get it tomorrow.

[Opole] November 12, 1960

. . . My constant loneliness, solitude (outside of work in the theatre) is killing me. . . . At this very moment my colleagues are partying and laughing. . . .

[Opole] November 17, 1960

. . . I feel frail; as usual by the middle of the month I'm penniless and can't scrape together a living. Hard times. . . .

Only my work in the Theatre cheers me up. My achievements are growing. We're working on a new debut, *Shakuntala*—I'm doing the title role. Rehearsals are exhausting.

. . . I bought a couple of books. (My paycheck was 250 zloties for the Anniversary of the Revolution program—now again I'm flat broke. Perhaps it was a stupid thing to buy those books; I spent my last 78 zloties on them).

[Opole] March 22, 1961

First rehearsal of [Forefathers' Eve](#).

Wrocław: performances of *Shakuntala* and *Mystery-Bouffe*.¹⁹

[Lecture notes or recollections of Grotowski's talk:]

1. Coming into consciousness (dreams in the subconscious become activated)
2. Artistic—positive memory.

¹⁶ *Shakuntala* adapted from Kalidasa, Polish translation by Stanisław Schayer, adapted and directed by Jerzy Grotowski, stage design [Jerzy Gurawski](#), costumes by the pupils from the Opole Arts School (class of Wincenty Maszkowski). Mirecka played the title role. She was also one of the two assistant directors with Antoni Jahołkowski. Osiński, *Teatr "13 Rzędów" i TeatrLaboratorium "13 Rzędów,"* 56–58.

¹⁷ After the performance of [Mystery-Bouffe](#) by Vladimir Mayakovsky at the 13 Rows Theatre, premiere July 31, 1960: Władysław Lubecki, "Wielkie nieporozumienie" [The Great Misunderstanding], *Trybuna Opolska*, October 13, 1959, 4. Osiński, *Teatr "13 Rzędów" i TeatrLaboratorium "13 Rzędów,"* 53–54.

¹⁸ Jerzy S. Sito, "Dialektyka przemian" [The Dialectics of Change], *Polityka*, October 15, 1960, 7.

¹⁹ Between March 16 and 20, 1961. Osiński, "Występy gościnne Teatru Laboratorium 1959–1984," 632.



Mystery Bouffe, Opole, 1960. Rena Mirecka. Photo by Leonard Olejnik. Reproduced courtesy of Agnieszka Wójtowicz

The embarrassment of “hamming”:

1. Professional theatres – better technically, whereas ours is amateurish.
2. Our embarrassment in acting means, that in comparison the other [professional] “cowboy” is technically complete. An actor who goes all out, with pure energy but also vagueness, if he succeeds with the public it’s because of his personal charm – that’s “hamming.” It is wholly a matter of our own taste.

Antek [Jahołkowski’s] number about Antoni was more or less a professional gig. To a viewer lacking taste it might have seemed to be art: charm is a gift, it gives an enormous advantage, but it does not make up for lack of technique. Antek verges constantly on fraud. “I say this because I have a lot of good will and confidence in your development. It is as if a child were mooning the audience. Is it funny? Yeah, it’s funny, but it’s not art. We grow into our skill. We have to be ambitious and not sell out. I wouldn’t be talking about this if there weren’t art in your performance of the Fisherman in *Shakuntala*. It was so effective that I was asked all the time how did I manage such an achievement with these amateur actors. That was about Jahołkowski and Ms. Barska.

“After Antek’s little summer job [outside the Laboratory Theatre], the work in the Theatre became uneasy.

“Bad taste is the consequence of poor technique.

“Ms. Barska’s performance is a matter difficult to define. If one bombs utterly, you’ve got to know how to take it in stride and not show that you’re not even worthy of the company.”

Jerzy is talking about performances in *Harlequin*: the gestures of provincial heroines.

"[It is inescapable here:] 1. The verification of one's aesthetic stance (taste—on stage this means a sense of beauty); 2. The consciousness of one's physical attributes.

"Is it consistent with our Theatre's ideology? . . ."

In his speech, Jerzy is comparing better-trained actors and the more effective ensemble work of a student/amateur group. "I wouldn't be saying this if things were hopeless. We must distinguish what it is we're doing officially, what stirs your soul, and what's a private reaction on stage.

"Our friend Kurczyna—private on stage. If it's nerves, an actor must overcome them. Privacy of reaction comes from an inadequate sense of place—the stage—where a creative act is realized publicly. Jog [in *Shakuntala*] is all about spiritual concentration, not private reaction. One such moment of privacy unravels belief that you respect your own work.

"[Andrzej Bielski](#). His attitude towards the Theatre is emotionally engaged, creates trust. 'Is your intention to become an actor? If so, your work ethic is not good enough to get you 5 percent. Your diction has declined; we're not even talking about acting. You can hide this sloppiness in some parts, but without improvement you won't be an actor.'

"Mr. Antek can not split the connection between voice and diction.

"Diction. Mr. Antek ('please stop yawning'—thrown at Ewa Lubowiecka) works in surges, but from the point of view of collegial decency Diction lessons should be taken away from you. 'Light a candle for God and one for the Devil'—that characterizes Antek's position among the colleagues. Things have come to a head and you must make up your mind, it cannot go on like this."

Just a moment ago, Jerzy gave me the position of permanent first assistant for all productions, widening my artistic competences.

"Actors' illnesses. Discretion and integrity within the ensemble. The disappearance of letters."

The guys have to take acting exams.

"Who are we? Prostitution: lack of a moral and dependable position, lack of conviction and taking money. The situation created by some denies creativity to others, particularly to our friends Mirecka and Molik."

Jerzy went on to talk about casting *Forefathers' Eve*. "Gustaw was supposed to go to Antek, but I've had to forgo this idea for these reasons: firstly—his lack of consistent preparation, secondly—his poor technique, thirdly—his unwillingness to give up side gigs. The effects are regression, unevenness. I'm saying this because you have to be aware that at this point it's a failure.

"A tendency not to be serious. As a director I con the audience by hiding the actor's deficiencies, but only where it doesn't threaten the integrity of the production's general structure."

I've raised the matter of punctuality.

Privacy on the stage means lack of clarity in the sequence of performing acts.



Mystery Bouffe, Opole, 1960. Antoni Jaholkowski and Rena Mirecka. Photo by Leonard Olejnik. Reproduced courtesy of Agnieszka Wójtowicz.

[On a separate page in the handwriting of Grotowski, a motto for the production:]

“Pełen guślarstwa obrzęd świętokradzki,
Pospółstwo nasze w grubej utwierdza ciemnocie,
Stąd dziwaczne powieści, zabobonów krocie
O nocnych duchach, upiorach i czarach.”

[This blasphemous ritual, full of sorcery
Confirms our people in their deepest ignorance;
This is the source of their tales and superstitions
About night spirits, vampires, and magic.]

— *Forefathers' Eve*. Entered by Forefather Grotowski, March 22, [19]61.



Shakuntala, Opole, 1960. Rena Mirecka in the title role. Photo by Leonard Olejnik. Reproduced courtesy of Agnieszka Wójtowicz.

[Opole] March 22, 1961, 10:25 a.m.

First reading: *Forefathers' Eve*.

"1. Demolishing of the stage. 2. An attempt to create a mystical production on one hand, on the other – a parody; a more disciplined production.

[Opole] March 27, 1961

Conversations – led by Jerzy Grotowski.

Opole, June 29, 1962, backstage 13 Rows Theatre

. . . on the other side of the wall rehearsals for [Akropolis](#) . . . I can't put a finger on exactly what's going on with me: I'm deaf and dumb, I ache from emptiness, I don't want anything, I don't know anything, I can't do anything, I just stare absentmindedly and smoke a cigarette. What a bad way to be.

Opole, July 21, 1962

[Before the trip to the Eighth Annual International Festival of Youth in Helsinki and soon after to People's Republic of China, Jerzy Grotowski left a handwritten note addressed to the ensemble of the Laboratory Theatre of 13 Rows:]

"In case of an emergency, if my return is delayed (after September 16) I turn over the artistic direction of the theatre to colleague Flaszen and the direction of studies to colleague Mirecka.

In the case of colleague Flaszen's absence, artistic direction is to be taken over by colleague Mirecka.

In my absence, there should be intensive workshops (at least 6 hr/day, including Sundays):

Plasticity (Mirecka)

Eurhythmics ([Cynkutis](#))

Diction (Molik)

Etudes ([Barba](#)).

In addition, colleagues Barba or Mirecka are obliged to run a rehearsal of the *Akropolis* text.

After September 16 colleague [Komorowska](#) is obliged to begin collaboration with colleague Czajkowska (gradually taking over her functions).

Please pay attention to cleanliness and neatness of the space.

Grotowski

July 21, 1962."²⁰

[Szczawnica] August 31, 1962

. . . I am amazed by our Theatre.

[Opole] October 25, 1962

Conversations. Jerzy Grotowski leading.

Myth: universal truths, repeated by generation after generation, for example: every year a child is born that is supposed to save the world through his suffering. It is a model myth.

²⁰ Two pages in blue ink on lined paper torn out of a notebook.

[Thomas Mann](#) said that myths characterize society's worldview, but on the most primitive level, in the case of individuals, they develop late—in middle age. Especially important here are our studies of [Max Weber](#) and [Carl Gustav Jung](#).

Egregor.
 Archetype: Acropolis, biblical stuff.
 Gnostics—pneumatics, psychics, hylics.
 Rosicrucians.
 "Guardian of the Threshold."

[Łódź] February 28, 1963

The influence of sorrows, irritations, and private failures on what we call the "re-creation of the character" at every evening's performance is not immaterial. I think that it is hard to generalize since actors' reactions are so different. When it comes to me, I feel everything indescribably. For example: yesterday was my birthday (I'm 29 years old)—nobody remembered . . . —I was devastated. I was so distraught that I wasn't able to separate that from the world of the character. I believe that the distress I was feeling in private was in some way equally tragic for me as the fact that my character [in *Akropolis*] is going to be consumed in a crematorium. . . .

We are in Łódź performing from February 16 to March 5; we're playing *Akropolis* by [Wyspiański](#). There is a lot of curiosity about our performance and our form of acting. The ensemble is in good form, although they drink a lot. Today I'm giving two performances—that takes incredible strength and stamina. I am almost completely exhausted.

[Łódź] March 2, 1963

We are performing splendidly. (Really, no joke. Lots of people here think so; for example yesterday, after the performance for the theatre school students, we had professional guests—like movie directors—speak, and they were all captivated.) We're close to the finish here, but my strength is gone. I know that private stuff takes a disproportionate toll on me. . . .

During the matinee I slacked off a little—I tried not to push and I was much less tired afterwards. I am also, however, much less satisfied. . . .

[Łódź] Sunday, March 3, 1963

I've just finished a rehearsal for *Forefathers' Eve*. Tomorrow we've got a concert in the "Journalists" Club—it's going to be a presentation of selected scenes from our old repertoire: *Forefathers' Eve*, [Kordian](#), *Mystery-Bouffe*. During the rehearsal, Grotowski and I got into it. He is upset that I don't know the text of the songs from the Great Improvisation. It's true, but his approach is so inhuman, ruthless and spiteful, especially since he informed us about the rehearsal at the last moment. Life with Grotowski is not easy.

Inside the theatre things are not so good, because some guys are generally mad at Grot; it's not all justified because they're not forthcoming, and in the case of [Cieślak](#)—not working hard. He is a case study of laziness and of blaming everybody else. . . .



Akropolis, version 1 (rehearsal), Opole, 1962. Zygmont Molik and Rena Mirecka. Photo of the Laboratory Theatre. Reproduced courtesy of the Grotowski Institute Archives.

[Opole] March 19, 1963

11:00 a.m.–1 p.m. Rehearsals of *Faust*. A scene with Molik, Prus, and Cynkutis. The Boss asks Cynkutis, me, and Bielski what we think about the scene. Cieślak insists that he can't judge since he partnered in the scene. I suggested paying attention to the changing rhythm of the words. They're trying it again, but Grot wants to identify the dangers in this scene.

Prus must work harder at justifying the form from a vocal/sound perspective of the text. . .

Theatre work is so difficult, especially in our theatre, where the stage is made up of two rectangular tables, one meter wide. They are placed one next to the other, divided by a sitting bench for the audience. On those tables, one-and-a-half-meters tall, we must work, doing a lot of physical acting, feats of flexibility, and gymnastics. It is challenging, especially for someone with high anxiety. I know that fear, and it's v[ery] difficult for me. It bothers me.

Grot's directing of actors is unusual, but awesome. I would need to dedicate hours and hours to describe it adequately. We are back working on scenes from *Faust*, from the beginning. I have only a few scenes. Thus I am able, sitting here on an audience bench like the rest of my colleagues not in the scenes, to write down my thoughts. Today, however, I find it particularly difficult; I can't focus. When I make the transition from my everyday earthly tasks to the work in the Theatre, I usually feel a sense of confusion and something I see as almost betrayal. I often think that Art is jealous; if we turn away from it even for a moment, it escapes us to a great degree, and in order to make contact with it again, we have to work twice as hard.

(I am also working on lyrics for a cabaret. I need the additional income. I already have to send home 500 zloties a month: they closed [my parents'] workshop; all they have to live on is their pension. I have to help them even though I'm struggling myself.)

It's not going too well, since while Faust-Cynkutis is rehearsing the rest I'm not really benefiting, and the time that is spent not working is forever gone.

7 p.m.-11 p.m. We're trudging forward. Cynkutis is trying to cast a spell on this scene. I know I'm not allowed to leave this theatre yet. I need the attention; I'm not an autonomous actor just yet. I also know that my confidence grows only with Grot's encouragement.

Hmm, Grot is sitting backstage; he is having a kidney episode. He asked me not to tell the others. I have to go check on him. He is back; I wonder how he's feeling.

Some (Antoś Jahołkowski) are working on their roles in the same room. I'm not sure if that's a good idea. I wouldn't be able to tune out with the others on the "stage-tables." . . .

[Opole] March 22, 1963

Today's rehearsal started with people being five, ten minutes tardy. Cynkutis was late a whole hour. We pay for each tardiness with percentages of our wages. Since Molik is responsible for keeping the rolls and he does this very stringently, a whole discussion got going about this, which, in the end, sabotaged the work. As usual, Grot is the arbiter in the conflict, and he tries to be rational about it. In the end, the effect is that the rehearsal was canceled today; instead we will "rehearse" plasticity and gymnastics.

[Opole] Sunday, March 24, 1963

Since this morning the Theatre is a madhouse. We've got guests, "professionals" – as the Boss calls them. Yesterday they saw *Akropolis*. Today from 10 a.m. to 3 p.m. and then again from 6 p.m., we were in the theatre with them. Well, a few people from *Pamiętnik Teatralny* [journal] came: Mr. [Raszewski](#) and three other men and a lady – I don't know their names.²¹ Before the rehearsal we had a discussion with them – they were interested in the creative path for each character.

Right now Zbyszek Cynkutis, Faust, is trying the "signature scene" for the fourth time. I think he's really tired. He looks it.

Today Cieślak showed us the *Faust* Pope's walk for the first time. (He worked on it with the Boss outside of rehearsals). My impression was that it's very daring. He showed us the walk of a man with all the authority of a ruler, a seeming master of Man and Universe.

[Opole] April 2, 1963

It's been a while since I wrote down my observations and musings during rehearsals. Today we're starting with the confession scene. Ryszard and Andrzej Bielski are up. I'm going to see it for the first time.

²¹ Those were Bożena Frankowska, Zenobiusz Strzelecki, Jerzy Timoszewicz, and Andrzej Wyśniski. Osiński, *Teatr "13 Rzędów" i Laboratorium "13 Rzędów,"* 114.



Akropolis, version 3; Opole, 1964. From left, Maja Komorowska, Rena Mirecka, Zbigniew Cynkutis, Barbara Barska, and Zygmunt Molik. Photo of the Laboratory Theatre. Reproduced courtesy of the Grotowski Institute Archives.

I don't know, probably these notes are going to be different from the others. I am v[ery] upset. . . . The work on each and every gesture of the hand is similar to forming drops of mercury, which pool with so much difficulty.

Mr. Raszewski wrote a letter to the Theatre.²² He is full of praise for the Boss and the ensemble. I look at this as a historic marker in the development and the struggle of our Theatre.

How much more and how differently I feel after I've lived through disappointment, disillusionment, and pain. Everyday, ordinary thoughts, yet so corrosive deep inside. My voice is failing. It bothers me something awful. . . .

When a scene is just not coming together, the Boss tells us to go back to the general score of physical movement and text. It gives clarity of purpose.

[Opole] April 3, 1963

10 a.m.–2 p.m. Rehearsal starts with the great “signature scene.” Always before the start of the rehearsal proper, the actors are asked to go back to the text and to read anew the whole score of the situation and movement. The Boss told me that my “scene of sins” was very clean—he understood everything, he knew exactly what was at stake.

[Opole] April 6, 1963

It's been quite a few days . . . since September. I did not write [during those seven months] of lessons because I've been memorizing the exercises, and now I lead them without notes. . . . I've come up with a few exercises on my own, for example today: 1. The right shoulder is doing a rotation backward; the knees are rotating to the right, body weight is shifted to the toes. The movement should be continuous, without shifting onto heels. 2. Both shoulders are rotating backward, knees are rotating outward, toes are up as high as possible. 3. Work—exercises for wrists and fingers, wrists are horizontal, knuckles one after another move as if they touched an enemy and pushed him away.

The Mask: upper lip out, lower lip out.

[Some of the exercises, especially those described as “work” and “mask” were directly in preparation for the staging of *Akropolis* by Wyspiański].

[Opole] April 7, 1963

7 p.m.–11 p.m. Rehearsal of *Faust* with Cieślak, Cynkutis, and Bielski. They're doing the scene of Benvolio's miraculous recovery. They took apart the tables, all the tops are off; the table legs are raised high up.

[Opole] April 22, 1963

Exercises, theoretical rather than practical.

[Mirecka notating Grotowski's lecture:]

“It is a mystery to all how long of a chance we've got to survive; that's why we need to exploit it quickly. If I were hit by a tram tomorrow, the Theatre would be over—no one among the colleagues is ready to take over. To acquire the elementary basis of the method—the time of persuasion is passed. Now it's a matter of faith and humility in reaching our goal.

²² The letter of Zbigniew Raszewski could not be found in the archives of the Grotowski Center [now the Grotowski Institute] in Wrocław.

"Acting is the *art of the body*; which depends on handling and sculpting by the actor. The body can be mastered if it is consciously guided. . . . There are no ugly or beautiful beings when they are mastered, or made spiritual. The art of the actor is to make the body inner." Grotowski always says that "outside of the actor there is no theatre, for example, lighting design, sets, music—that is not theatre. Today there is no poverty of music or poverty of literature; the poverty of theatre lies in the deficiency and poverty of the actor.

"The medieval world knew no emptiness since it was filled with all kinds of religion. The modern world became very dynamic externally, but inner life is emptiness. An actor can guide the public's consciousness. The problem of angst and doubt requires rejection and taking a 'leap of faith' (citing Kierkegaard)."

Objectives of exercises

Up until now exercises worked in a semi-conscious way. From now on we need to restructure three stages of making the body inner.

1. fundamental – mastering basic exercise elements
2. tackling the self, the self's secret regions – challenging the painful, the sensitive parts of self
3. making the body inner by assaulting society's baggage (archetypes) through our own body

The search should take place in our own interiors, in our imaginations, in our impulses.

The conclusion of the analysis of our skills and our performances so far is that the most important and difficult work is still ahead of us.

New challenges (corrections)

1. exercising readiness: adjustment while in motion, warm focus on work – checking in with the body = giving different body parts different tasks, release, relaxation;
2. exercising the discipline of gesture (plasticity): controlling gesture, mask, and walk – develop exercises for every finger, etc.;
3. discipline of the body: movement, flexibility, gymnastics in space;
4. exercising breath and vocals – rhythmic thought, rhythmic words;
5. interpretation etudes.

Complete *silence* is a necessary component of the exercises.

New objectives: to achieve a new anatomy of the actor's body. I believe we will not be able to get any further when during exercises we don't check our body's accumulators of energy. These are found at the root of nerve cells. We need to monitor spine function – experiment with trance-inducing elements – check for the focus of expression (points at which we all start to open up, for example, by stimulating the genital areas).

The arsenal of expression (or so-called technique) is a sad illusion, because that is not what constitutes art. There are only hurdles in technique, which must be overcome.

Every new role is supposed to be an adventure, the breaking of a new barrier. We must die over and over in that role, so that we are born anew to explore new regions through our work.

General comments

1. exercises should be shortened;
2. institute obligatory individual exercises when some people are rehearsing.

Release and relaxation: [Stanislavsky](#), Wołkoński.

Plasticity: Wołkoński.

Analogy of the body and sculpture in differing art periods.

Exercises for feet and hands.

For those who have difficulties, institute special individually designed tasks within group exercises.

Combine plasticity with breath and rhythm exercises.

General group deficiencies: the habit of opening up the throat, the habit of supporting vowels while exhaling, the lack of resonating (chest, or head).

Reading out loud is counterproductive: leads to mannered diction—like a pseudo-intellectual radio announcer's. *Must rehearse from memory.*

The control of rhythm, phrasing, accenting syllables, is [generally] poor.

Focusing exercises (eurhythmics)

Searching for a point within ourselves which allows us to focus and from which we will be starting.

While focused on that point in our body, searching for centers of expression, for example, if expression is concentrated in our hands, we begin an internal monologue and let our hands move, eventually transferring movement to the rest of our bodies, thus working on inducing trance. There is such a thing as false concentration.

The exercises are interconnected. Transitions should be gradual.

Reading should spark the imagination. There will be moments that need to be monitored. We should note the kind of associations we are making; are those general associations, that is about me and the world, me and the others, me and the human condition?

To be fully conscious of one's body is to know how to generate the body's immediate reaction. The flow between our mind and our body is open, because by knowing every little cog of our physical machine, we can control it."

[Four months later, after rereading the notes, Mirecka wrote in green ink:]

July 27, 1963. When I recall this lecture, Boss, I believe it came from the experience of your body and soul.

[Opole] May 1, 1963

Exercises in plasticity. I only write down what's new, because the basics are repeated from the first lesson.

1. Walking, raising one leg, rotating the other foot around.
2. Exercising hands, small digits.
3. Exercising switching fingers.
4. Pantomime walk
5. Mask: search for eye expression, flash of whites only.
6. Feet first-position, squats.
7. Exercising feet and toes.

[Opole] May 21, 1963

Return from guest appearances in Kraków. We did *Faust* and *Akropolis*. . . . Yesterday I spoke with a pantomime artist. He showed me a hand gesture—I just caught myself doing it, I

would call it “gliding”: all three knuckles are gradually engaged. I will probably bring it up at plasticity exercises, but now I’ve got to hit the hay.

[Opole] May 22, 1963

Eugenio Barba—an Italian, who came to the Theatre to learn our method and to get his directing diploma, is starting rehearsals for Dante’s *Divine Comedy*. R[yszard] Cieślak is Dante. My prediction is—it’s going to be a hellish time!

[Opole] May 24, 1963, I think.

There are times when my patience is running out . . .

[Opole] May 29, 1963

Movement.
Falling down.
To the ladders.

Reverse hands—arrive at a reverse movements of hands, one is doing circles, the other straight line. I noticed it gets better and easier with getting it into a consistent rhythm.

Exercises are led today without a sense of focus. Cieślak is talking, not doing. I’m overcome by chaos—can’t concentrate.

[Opole] May 31, 1963

I’m so excited. First—a conversation with the Finn [Kristen Olsoni] (an actress from a Helsinki theatre).²³ She’s here because she finds our Theatre fascinating.

[Jerzy Andrzejewski](#) attended *Doctor Faustus* [*Faust*] yesterday. In a radio interview he said: “That was one of the greatest experiences I’ve had in a theatre.”

. . . Secondly, I talked to Alinka about renting a flat. Jesus, how wonderful would it be to have my own place! It’s so hard to work at home when the noise from next door is so loud; . . . how am I supposed to concentrate in such conditions? The baby is screaming and then her grandmother and then the grandfather. I want to conceptualize the role from *Divine Comedy*.

I’ve read so little up to now—it’s a shame.

I’m still struggling with limitations in my diction and vocal technique. The Boss’s mandatory exercises, which are led by Molik, are basic. I’ve gotten control over my breathing—somewhat—the intricacies are humongous. First, you’ve got to force yourself to be consistent, meaning, once you understand the basic concepts of how to inhale/exhale, do it again and again, deeply. It should go this way: cover one nostril with a fingertip, open your mouth slightly, relax your abs, slowly fill up with air from your lower abs to your chest (do not tighten your abs). Next, suck in your lower abs to support and prolong that breath. On the inhale, your muscles should be lowered and your ribcage expanded. Let the air out through your mouth, slowly.

The next exercise is a simulation of catching a ping-pong ball in your mouth. It goes exactly the same as the first exercise but much faster.

Until recently, I had very shallow breathing, which completely choked my voice box. For maybe the last month, I’ve really dedicated myself to get that other breathing—deep and supported.

²³ In Osiński, *Teatr “13 Rzędów” i Laboratorium “13 Rzędów,”* 139–40.

When I'm supposed to inhale correctly on stage, I still struggle. But, whenever I can control it during performance, I make sure to do it the right way. I keep the thought running through my mind: breath with your abs.

Every role, long after the opening night, requires continuous work.

[Opole] June 30, 1963

During plasticity group exercises, there was a very unpleasant incident involving me and R[yszard]. He is always talking, discussing everything, and this time my reaction was very sharp and probably overblown.

Different psychological states produce big shifts in acting. . . .

[Opole] July 1, 1963

What a mess this journal is! Today, Mike Elster starts shooting a film about us—an impressionistic piece about the Theatre. We're shooting my plasticity lesson first.

My lesson plan: 1. Warm-up: bending forward, backward, to the sides; 2. Shoulder, trunk, hips, and knee rotations—in order and in transition; 3. Squats; 4. Wrists, fingers; 5. Chest exercises (got them from Kristin); 6. Mask—in the order of gesture—outward, inward. Mask arrangement for fright, joy, agony, and fury.

[Later added in green ink:] It all went differently but it's not important. What's important is whether the film is going to get shown at all after so much has changed since July 1.

We're shooting principal photography for Mike Elster's film. It's after 1 p.m. . . . , and outside it's raining, raining, raining.

In the afternoons, Mike is working with us in the Theatre. His film is underway. We're all sitting around posed like gymnasts or dancers, doing some vocalizing. I'm very focused. . . . I've been incommunicado, just staying with the work. It's a first really big job in front of the cameras, but I'm not thinking about them, and that's probably why I'm calm and sure that I'm not going to screw up. Mike, by the way, is very interesting in the way he works: cool, collected, a real authority figure.

[Opole] July 2, 1963

I've just dragged myself home from the Theatre. Second day of shooting. . . .

[Opole] July 3, 1963, 00:55 AM

It's been three days of shooting. I've had a few scenes with the others, one close-up with Maciek [Prus]. I was quite nervous; we had to repeat takes. This won't do, and I think that Mike is not too happy either. There was one really bad moment when Boss started interfering with the directing; his comments were rude and his voice showed irritation (he said in a raspy voice: "cut"), it all created tension and a horrible atmosphere.

Opole, July 4, 1963

I can see now, Boss, what is the path to achieving those conditions you talked about then in the meeting. I was asking you embarrassing questions; today I know a little more: our inner life is the basis of artistic inspiration, a wellspring, a stimulus. To achieve that life, we push ourselves to the limit of fatigue, physical and mental exhaustion, to a point where we feel our Selves with all our weaknesses, faults, and mistakes.



Rena Mirecka during exercises, Opole, 1964. Photo by Fredi Graedl, Laboratory Theatre. Reproduced courtesy of the Grotowski Institute Archives.

I am scared of *Faust* – we go on in just a few hours. After so many days away from it, I need more time with myself, to focus, to go over my objectives. I'd kill for a smoke; I've had nothing to eat. God, how hard it is for me! How I would appreciate some small gesture, some sense that someone cares about me! Then again, the ability and necessity of challenging yourself is the only sure way to grow as an actor.

I told this to Jerzy, who deep from his chair, just nodded. It is a tragic thing to be with him now: our Theatre is being assailed and it's most likely already doomed. It is He who is conscious of the inevitability of this fact, brought about by a disastrous, yet so typical, turn of fortune.

So I'm cultivating my anxiety as a perpetual wellspring.

I should write all the facts down together with their causes and consequences.

What is special about this form of theatre in my opinion?

What conclusions can we draw for the future?

July 17–18, 1963

I'm not sure whether I'm content or miserable. I feel such guilt, such disaffection with myself; I've not taken advantage of my Great Anxiety. Boss, you came along too late. I didn't want to say anything. I know it's my fault and it is infinitely harder on me. You said that there is a paper-thin wall between me and full consciousness. At this time there is again a great concrete barrier. . . . I feel I've lost something and it's not going to be any time soon that I'll again see the world, people, or art in the same way.

Our Theatre's fate is sealed. Boss, you said today that it is a very fortunate moment. The Theatre is peaking artistically and enjoying success widely known around the world. Especially on its western trails, the sky and the sun. Well?

I quit smoking three days ago. I'm feeling better. My voice is improving. I'm going to try to stick with it, because the build-up of mucus, the cardiovascular stress, the hoarseness, and lack of resonance of the voice, the scale limitation—all of those are reasons enough to overcome the vanity of smoking.

Boss . . . My God, I feel for him, this situation, the struggle, the pain, and still he calmly and confidently discusses plans for our future. He's already deliberating where to go and what to do, so as not to disappear. Guide us, Boss.

On the train to Szczawnica, July 20, 1963

I must strive for total bodily courage.

Make contact with Jacek Woszczerowicz, the [Byrskis](#); talk to [Gallowa](#). (Maybe I could go to the Pantomime [Theatre]).

Poznań, October 24, 1963

We have to fight for survival every day. We've been on the road for a week now. First, *Doctor Faustus* in Zielona Góra—good job. Yesterday, our first performance in Poznań (we're staying 'til the end of the month). The cultural elite of the city in full attendance. We killed—as Zygmunt [Molik] said.

[Hamlet](#) went on hold. I'm not sure if it's a good idea.

Whenever I encounter flakiness, my support system goes to hell. I don't feel like doing anything.

Poznań, October 29, 1963

The attendance at our performances is insanely huge. It has to influence the quality of acting. Last night Boss was livid.

We're working on voice and plasticity in the hotel—not enough room. Two more shows and we're gone, but there is a deluge of people.

Opole, May 17, 1964

The Boss returned from Paris two days ago. In his opinion, with the general decline in craft, no one can touch us. Next year we might go to France.

During Jerzy's absence, Ryszard took over. I think he showed a lot of guts and resolve, but he was not able to create that warm and welcoming atmosphere, because of his constant tension and arrogance.

The day after the Boss's return they began individual rehearsals for [The Constant Prince](#).

In the meantime, we did a 45-minute poetry montage, for public programming, entitled *Songs*—A[ndrzej] Bielski directed. The Boss saw it yesterday; he was very pleased and congratulated Andrzej.

How easily we lose that internal certainty. A year ago, I was sure I knew a lot. Now again, I feel lost. Maybe I'm too comfortable.²⁴

²⁴ A note in the margins of a loose leaf of notes made on July 1-2, 1963.

Opole, October 18, 1964

First theoretical lectures of the season. I'm feeling wounded. The thought that I can't count on the support of those closest to me, that I can't trust them, is just too distressing and alienating. It undermines my craft.

People are late to the lecture. The Boss is passing out penalties—percentages lost. (Jesus, Jurek,²⁵ you've aged so much.)

The Boss was talking about Wrocław. After yesterday's conference there, we're officially on for a move, so January 1st it's going to happen. Will I still be around?! . . .

Opole, December 2, 1964*Tradition*²⁶1. *Insight*

- challenging of self, mutilation, slippage;
- aching, baggage, archetypes;
- insight—excess.

2. Training, tearing down the body.

3. Concentration, the heart, actor's anatomy.

4. Gestures of the body, the facade of the body, sculpting.

Silent score, unarticulated;

The Impoverished Actor.

5. Mortal sins: tautology, conventional wisdom.

6. New beginning: erasure, training, the character.

7. Living material: tendency toward balance turns into tendency toward contradiction (balancing-out); brilliance of rupture, radiation, aftershocks of rupture:

I—Partner,
 Artificiality—Physiology,
 Physiology—Thought,
 Contradictions within the body,
 Cold Score—Hot Score,
 External Motivation—Internal Motivation.

8. Internal orgasm in the physical score; hidden sexual score, building on the primal energy (a reservoir).

9. Humility—fear of the sacred, not “Yes,” rather, relinquishing “No.”

10. Sacred actor, stripped to the core, living sacrifice, not-for-private-use, fulfillment.

²⁵ [Jurek is a nickname for Jerzy, so Mirecka is referring to Grotowski here].

²⁶ According to notes of Rena Mirecka and from the notebook of Zbysław Cynkutis, which I was given by Jolanta Cynkutis.

In Mirecka's notes (notebook in blue cover, lined, pages not numbered, written in pencil on six pages) it reads: “As dictated by Boss [Grotowski] on December 2, 1964;” the differences from Cynkutis's notes are given in brackets. In Cynkutis the same lecture takes four pages of notes in blue ink. The text of “Tradition” immediately follows the text titled “The Principles of Creative Action. What Unites Our Method?”; next to it, Cynkutis wrote: “(–) J. Grotowski.”



Rena Mirecka during exercises, Opole, 1964. Photo by Fredi Graedl, Laboratory Theatre. Reproduced courtesy of the Grotowski Institute Archives.

II.

- A. Tradition is not to be accepted; it is what the Angel was to Jacob.
- B. Developing our abilities to their natural limit, staying devoted to one's calling.
- C. Don't: demonstrate the role (distanced actor)
 Don't: Feel the role (actor putting himself in the character's circumstances)
 Do: consume yourself, fight against yourself—the role emerges as a funeral pyre, a burning substance, straw, and wood.
- D. Theatre is not a craft; it is a shelter of the craft.
- E. Conformity in life, nonconformity in practicing the craft."

[Grotowski's commentary on particular points of the lecture:]

Everything here is a kind of artistic testament and is the result of our collective work in the ensemble, with the active participation of our colleagues. Looking inward and exploring these guidelines, an actor will achieve a sort of acting genius. I'm aware that such a proclamation is risky, but I'm confident it's the truth.

Re. 1. What do we mean by Self-discovery as a process?

It is not a process of thinking but a process of searching for what is subconscious in our psychological make up that we want to bring out.



Rena Mirecka during exercises, Opole, 1964. Photo by Fredi Graedl, Laboratory Theatre. Reproduced courtesy of the Grotowski Institute Archives.

Challenging oneself: providing enough impulses (psychological injuries) to break down our everyday masks. Self-probing – studying those stimuli that cause angst the most.

Fresh ache: those sore spots in our psyche that react instantly when stimulated.

Archetypes: that which can not be conceptualized.

Penetration—excess: posing challenges to oneself stretching beyond our capacity and beyond attainment.

Re. 3. Perception: which of our bodily faculties help and which hinder our work.

Concentration—finding our “Self” centered in the heart area, capturing the feeling of quiet generalized sorrow. The heart communicates to other parts of the body. The state of intense focus produces release and surrender. Observe what in your body obstructs full concentration.

Re. 4. There is no abstract “hand gesture,” for example, any movement of the body comes as a result of psychological processes. Sculpting of the actor’s body: I feel the character within me and I strip away the burden of myself. [Movement is not generated by the hand, rather, it begins within the body and it culminates in a hand gesture. The same is true for the leg, the face, etc.]

The craft of the actor is similar in its trimming-down process to sculpture, but not to painting, which is dependent on adding on (or bad acting).

The Impoverished Actor sheds his own person, denies that, which is the pride of his own self.

Re. 5. The two mortal sins: tautology and demonstrating the text.

[Re. 6.] Uncover that which is unexpected and which discovers the truly new being.

Re. 7. Any living organism is always thrown out of kilter by its desire to achieve balance – that's just life. A corpse has accomplished the balancing act of death.

[Re. 8.] Acting is dependent on elementary contradictions working toward resolution. They should come close, but never rest. They will never resolve, but at their moment of contact comes a flash of brilliant clarity.

Re. 9. If we don't allow ourselves to feel completely vulnerable in the face of a new challenge, we won't achieve true creativity.

[Re. 10.] In the after-effect of this vulnerability comes creative surrender, which disallows our falling back on technique. We let our ego go and humbly set to work with the full realization of the gravity of this "sacred" duty.

Season 1964/1965

Phase I – isolated, laboratory-like setting

Phase II – the Institute, working out new creative techniques – concrete results, and mysterious pathways.

Technique = living, breathing being

Period of proselytizing – making waves around Poland and outside of Poland. (Here, the Boss reads an official letter from Wrocław. Bravo! January 1st, we're there.)

The Institute – practical technique

Technique (not a bag of tricks) works on an all-encompassing development of the actor's individuality. Thus, it approaches the phenomenon of creation (such as a school of yoga, or Jung's psychoanalysis).

Adapting expectations: Actor as the main standard of the theatre.

Creative technique divides into: 1. Basic technique, which includes: a) exercises, b) arrangement of the role (artifice, internal polemics).

Technique 1 [T1] succeeds when it transforms from a deductive technique into an inductive technique. As a result we achieve a creative technique, which allows for the elimination of all obstacles (such as breathing or physical limitations) and the emergence of intuitive creation which transitions from physical ability to polemics of the body, from training to systematic provocation, that is from T1 to T2.

T2 is intuitive (self-probing of many areas, unleashing the hidden reservoir of the actor's psyche).

T2 can be achieved through the practice of T1. Through experience we accumulate those elements, which will get us to the moment of the spontaneous release of creative energy. T1 through the exercises, through the abandonment of self to the exercises, through a general psychological approach, we can achieve T2. In the creative act the mind is silent.

Conditions

1. Exhibitionism in private life is detrimental.
2. Silence is golden.
3. Being open to the ironies of rehearsals.
4. The act of concentration.
5. Internal discipline (treating T1 as a sacred duty leads to T2)

T2 may bother some actors who specialize in T1; that is a psychological barrier to T2.
T2 – the unleashing of individualized capabilities.

6. Trusting the work: trusting the guide, self-sacrifice, pushing beyond, violation, trance.

T2 – the “Sunny Phase”

All exercises turn into *acting etudes*, tasks that lead to an ever-flowing internal stream of creativity.

External exercises (composition, calligraphy) and internal exercises working on psychological make-up: individual chain of associations.

Premiere – program preparation.

Lectures in plasticity and anatomy.

The aim of exercising is creative *experimentation*. Exercises are not meant to teach anyone anything but to experiment on oneself.

Open studies.

Individual super-etudes: work on exercises as preparation for your scene.

Open scholarship: Stanislavsky, [Meyerhold](#), [Dullin](#).

Workshops: methodology of physical work = work without props (closer to life), working through the composition will expose the good and the bad side of technique.

1. Schedule of general exercises.
2. Individual exercises – open experimentation.
3. Journaling. Organizing journals into sections.

Therapy. Creation of a therapeutic clinic.

Common session once a year.

– Selected and edited by Zbigniew Osinski, translated by Eva Sobolewski

Zbigniew Osinski is Professor Emeritus of Polish at Warsaw University. In 1990 he founded the Center for the Study of Jerzy Grotowski's Work and for Theatrical and Cultural Research in Wrocław, and until 2004 served as its director. Osinski's numerous works on theatre history and theory and the anthropology of theatre include many on Grotowski. His English-language works on Grotowski include *Grotowski's Laboratory* (together with Tadeusz Burzyński); *Grotowski and His Laboratory*; and the script for the television documentary *Jerzy Grotowski, Attempt at a Portrait* (in Polish, with English subtitles).

Rena Mirecka was one of the key individuals in Grotowski's theatrical and paratheatrical experiments from 1959 until the dissolution of the Laboratory Theatre in 1984. She performed in all of Grotowski's productions, including *Akropolis*, *The Constant Prince*, and *Apocalypsis cum Figuris*, and was instrumental in the conception and development of the *Plastique* exercises. In the early 1990s she settled in Sardinia, Italy, where together with a group of friends she founded the Prema Sayi International Work Center and has since pursued her own personal research in physical and spiritual theatrical expression. Mirecka now conducts meetings and workshops for participants from all over the world based on her experiences in the Laboratory Theatre.